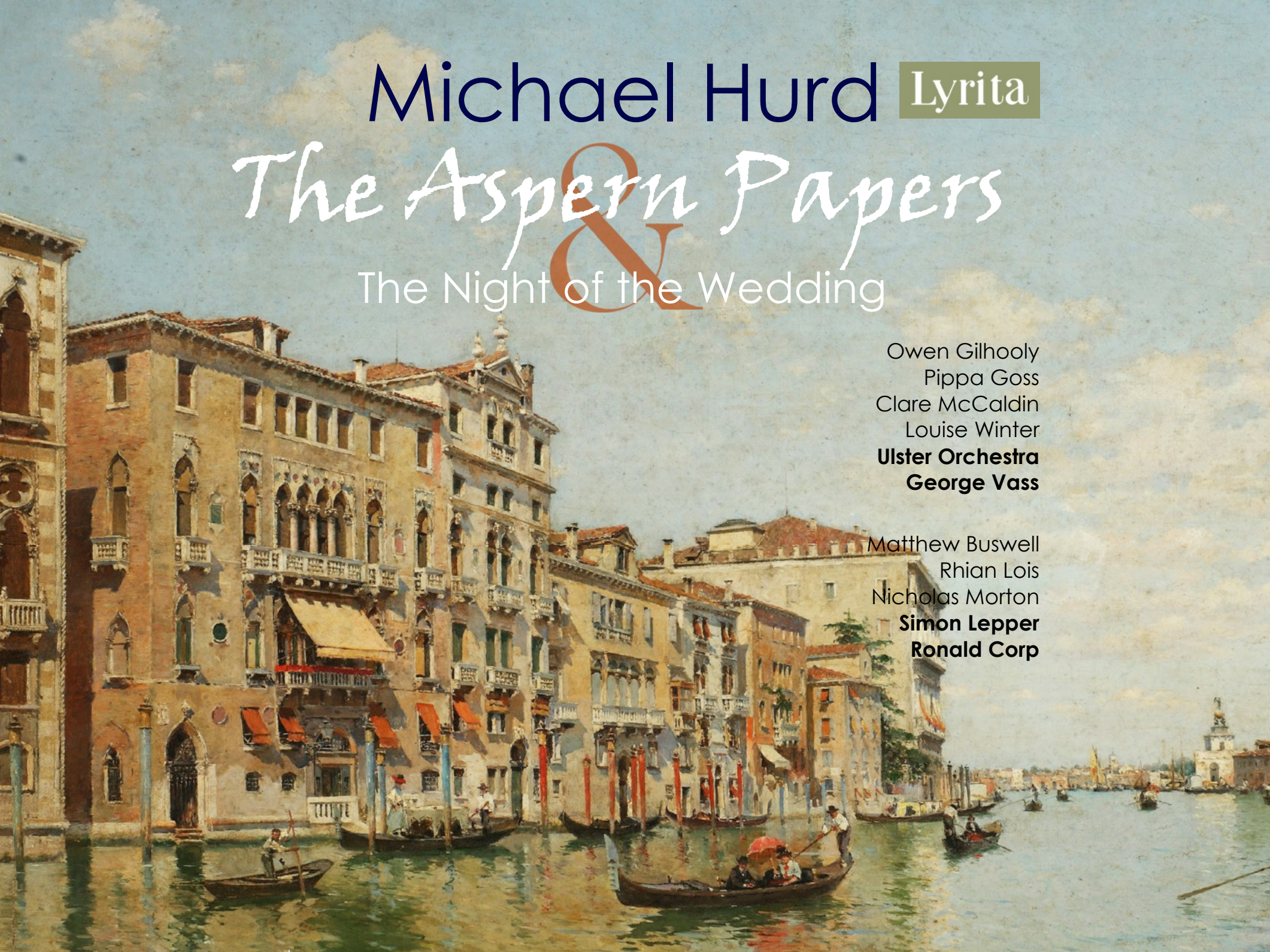
Michael Hurd

Lyrita

The Aspern Papers & The Night of the Wedding



Owen Gilhooly
Pippa Goss
Clare McCaldin
Louise Winter
Ulster Orchestra
George Vass

Matthew Buswell
Rhian Lois
Nicholas Morton
Simon Lepper
Ronald Corp

MICHAEL HURD

(1928-2006)

The Aspern Papers

(Chamber Opera in Three Acts,1994)

Harry Jordan – Owen Gilhooly, baritone
Mrs Prest – Pippa Goss, soprano
Miss Tina/Servant – Clare McCaldin, mezzo soprano
Juliana Bordereau – Louise Winter, mezzo soprano

Ulster Orchestra
conducted by George Vass

Producer: Michael Ponder. Engineer: David Neill.
Assistant engineer: Alexandra Forsyth
Re-mastering engineer: Richard Scott
Recording location and date: Ulster Hall, Belfast. 12-14 September 2011

MICHAEL HURD

(1928-2006)

The Night of the Wedding

(Chamber Opera in One Act,1998)

Count Gervaise de Polisson – Nicholas Morton, baritone
Antoine, his manservant – Garry Humphreys, baritone
La Marquise de Belle Poitrine – Rhian Lois, soprano
Le Marquis – Matthew Buswell, baritone

Simon Lepper, piano
conducted by Ronald Corp

Producer and engineer: Michael Ponder
Recording location and date: Henry Wood Hall, London. 3 May 2014

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THE BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY CHARITABLE TRUST

Recording of *The Aspern Papers* was made in association with

Nova Music Opera

MICHAEL HURD (1928-2006)

The Aspern Papers
& The Night of the Wedding

	Disc ONE	**Playing time 69’33”**
	The Aspern Papers	
	Act 1	
1	Scene 1	16’08”
2	Scene 2	13’30”
	Act 2	
3	Scene 1	17’01”
4	Scene 2	12’21”
5	Scene 3	10’32”
	Disc TWO	**Playing time 41’24”**
	Act 3	
1	Scene 1	13’56”
2	Scene 2	10’47”
3	The Night of the Wedding	16’40”

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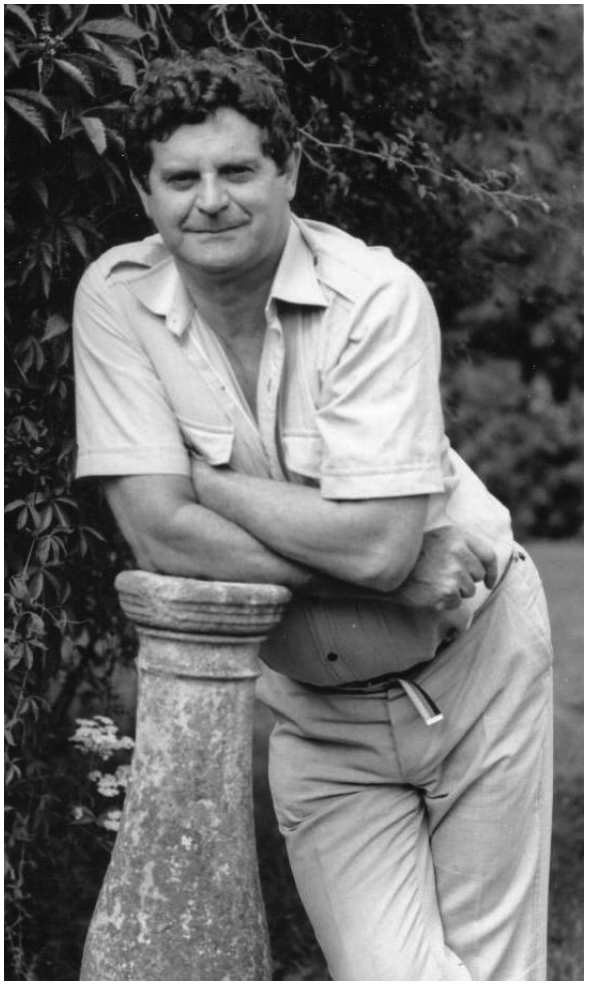
MICHAEL HURD (1928-2006)



Michael Hurd was born in Gloucester on 19 December 1928, the son of a self-employed cabinetmaker and upholsterer. His early education took place at Crypt Grammar School in Gloucester. National Service with the Intelligence Corps involved a posting to Vienna, where he developed a burgeoning passion for Opera. He studied at Pembroke College, Oxford (1950-53) with Sir Thomas Armstrong and Dr Bernard Rose and became President of the University Music Society. In addition, he took composition lessons from Lennox Berkeley, whose Gallic sensibility may be said to have influenced Hurd's own musical language, not least in the attractive and witty *Concerto da Camera* for oboe and small orchestra (1979), which he described in his programme note as a homage to Poulenc's 'particular genius'.

Following a six-year term (1953-59) as Professor of Music Theory at the Royal Marines School of Music in Deal, he settled in West Liss, Hampshire, dedicating the rest of his life to a variety of musical pursuits - composing, writing, conducting, lecturing and broadcasting. He shared with Benjamin Britten a desire to be involved in his local community by taking part actively in music-making, and his involvement as conductor, player and singer in events staged within his native Hampshire, and particularly his long association with the Farnham and Petersfield Festivals, was an affirmation of his strongly-held belief in the composer as a useful member of society. He travelled widely

and was a frequent visitor to Australia where he helped to found the Port Fairy Music Festival which staged the first performances of his last two operas. He died in Petersfield, Hampshire on 8 August 2006, at the age of 78.

Michael Hurd's books reflect a deep and passionate interest in early twentieth-century British music and he wrote seminal studies of Rutland Boughton[1] and Ivor Gurney[2] as well as concise biographical portraits of Britten, Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Tippett. He possessed a gift for addressing complex issues with clarity and incisiveness, something which served him well in a series of *Young Person's Guides* to concerts, opera, English Music and sailors' and soldiers' songs. Among his other publications is a percipient introductory portrait of the Composer, a figure unfashionably but accurately described as 'the most important person in music',[3] and a vivid account of the early history of the music publishing firm Novello & Company,[4] with whom he had a long-standing association. His last book, co-edited with Howard Ferguson, presents correspondence between the latter and Gerald Finzi and amounts to a dual-biography of the two featured composers.[5]

Hurd's love of literature and the human voice illuminated a natural talent for word-setting. Hence his catalogue is dominated by choral and vocal works, including operas, 'pop' cantatas, songs and anthems. He was especially noted for his many scores for children and amateurs, and his care to ensure that the material he wrote was within the reach of non-professional singers and accompanists accords with his conviction that composers should adopt a practical approach to their craft.

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[1] *Immortal Hour: The Life and Period of Rutland Boughton* (1962), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, updated as *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (1993). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[2] *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* (1978), Oxford: Oxford University Press; reprinted in paperback by Faber and Faber in 2008.

[3] *The Composer* (1968), London: Oxford University Press.

[4] *Vincent Novello and Company* (1981), London: Granada Publishing Ltd.

[5] *Letters of Gerald Finzi and Howard Ferguson* (2001), Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

His music for the stage consists of a children's nautical opera *Little Billy* (1964); the 'operatic entertainment for children' *Mr. Punch* (1970; a one-act chamber opera *The Widow of Ephesus* (1971); the three-act opera *The Aspern Papers* (1995) and the one-act chamber opera *The Night of the Wedding* (1998). Numerous scores written for radio, theatre and television include a wide-ranging series of projects undertaken with director Mai Zetterling comprising the 1969 film *Flickcorna*; *Play Things* (1980), a theatre production designed by Andy Warhol and premiered in the English Theatre, Vienna; the hard-hitting 1982 feature film *Scrubbers*, set in a closed women's borstal and *Sunday Pursuit* (1990), a short film for television starring Denholm Elliott and Rita Tushingham.

A series of popular cantatas began with the highly successful *Jonah-Man Jazz* (1966) and continued with *Swingin' Samson* (1973), *Hip Hip Horatio* (1974), *Rooster Rag* (1975), *Adam-in-Eden* (1981), *Captain Coram's Kids* (1988), *Prodigal* (1989, rev. 1991) and *Pop Pied Piper* (1998). In several of these tuneful and witty pieces for children's groups, Hurd uses a narrator and this device was also employed in his 'music-hall guide to Victorian living', *Mrs. Beeton's Book* (1982), whose 'every detail of good advice' is taken from the first edition (1861) of Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, to humorous effect.

His skilful treatment of texts is also evident in more serious works and enriches such diverse settings as the *Missa Brevis*, for choir and organ (1966), which was given at the 1968 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival; *Shore Leave*, five songs for baritone and strings (1967), performed at the 1998 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival; *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (words by Shakespeare), for mezzo-soprano, choir, timpani and strings (1974); the choral symphony *Shepherd's Calendar* (words by John Clare), for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra (1975), commissioned by the Southampton Choral Society, and *Five Spiritual Songs* (words by George Herbert), for unaccompanied choir (1995).

Among a select number of purely orchestral, chamber and instrumental works may be mentioned the *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin and strings (1968, rev. 1973); *Overture to an Unwritten Comedy* (1970, rev. 1979); *Harlequin Suite*, for brass quintet (1971, rev. 1983); *Dance Diversions* (1972); *Bagatelles*, for solo piano (1986); *Five Preludes*,

for solo piano (1989); Sonata for violin and piano (1989), and *Three-Piece Suite*, written in 2004 for recorder-player John Turner. The last of these works, which exists in versions with piano- , string quartet- and string orchestra-accompaniment, turned out to be the composer's final piece, characteristically droll and effective.

Lyrical and lucid, Michael Hurd's music was directly communicative. His relaxed and approachable style was sufficiently versatile to tap emotional depths, as in the poetic *Largo* of the flute/recorder sonatina (1964, rev. 2002), the wistful setting of John Clare's poem 'O Love is so deceiving' from *The Shepherd's Calendar* and the beautiful central passacaglia from the *Sinfonia Concertante*. Hurd offered this typically balanced and perceptive assessment of his own creative output: 'my music is accessible and, in the traditional sense, very tuneful. It is, however, not entirely predictable: certain rhythmic and harmonic subtleties lifting it, I hope, somewhat out of the ordinary'.[6]

Paul Conway, 2015

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[6] Michael Hurd in *Contemporary Composers*, eds. Brian Morton and Pamela Collins (1991), London: St James Press, p.431.

THE ASPERN PAPERS (1994)

Henry James had little success himself in writing for the theatre, but the many adaptations of his work for both stage and screen testify to his acute ability to exploit a dramatic situation. His 1888 novella *The Aspern Papers,* as realised in Michael Redgrave's elegant West End triumph of 1959, is a case in point. Although Hurd used the play as an additional source to the novella itself, the libretto of the opera is the composer's own succinct distillation of the matter. The set-up is deceptively simple:

Juliana Bordereau, in the watery Venetian twilight of her many years, jealously guards her treasure of papers and mementoes from the poet Jeffrey Aspern. Harry Jordan has sniffed out this hoard and determines at least to obtain sight of them and, in an echo of Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, is quite prepared to feign an interest in a younger woman, Miss Tina, to further his ends. The piece is essentially a triangular power struggle.

The subject struck a sympathetic note with Hurd. As a biographer himself (of both Ivor Gurney and Rutland Boughton) he understood the almost obsessive nature of the task. Thus Harry Jordan says in the opening scene: '*I must know everything there is to know and, knowing, I may bring to life again the very essence of the man himself.*'

However Hurd is not indifferent to the sensibilities of the target of the biographer, and the dramatic balance of the piece is assured. Quintessentially Jamesian themes – an American protagonist at emotional and cultural odds with Europe, a melancholic adherence to the past, and dialogue which almost suffocates itself in its multiple layers of meaning – present both opportunities and challenges to a composer, to all of which Hurd rises with equally telling effect.

Composer John McCabe was present at the first performance at the Port Fairy Spring Festival in Victoria, Australia on 14 October 1995, and felt that 'it was a thoughtful and rather moving exposition of a human situation that was unusual in operatic terms but nonetheless engrossing. The style, as I remember, was fairly conservative, reminiscent perhaps of Poulenc in his sentiment-filled mood, but none the worse for that. I felt it

was a sincere and deeply-felt response to the subject matter and deserved to be heard again.'

The composer himself held the work in high regard, albeit expressed in his characteristically self-deprecating fashion. He would have been deeply gratified by this recording.

Synopsis of Scenes

Act 1

Scene 1: A palazzo in Venice, morning, 1880.

Harry Jordan and Mrs Prest arrive at Juliana Bordereau's rather run-down home. He seeks sight of the papers she holds relating to the poet Jeffrey Aspern, and hopes to persuade the elderly lady to let him some rooms. Miss Tina arrives and suggests that an arrangement might be possible.

Scene 2: The same, two days later, evening.

Juliana interviews Harry and agrees to let him rooms – at an enormous price. He concurs and admits that his work involves the study of other writers. Left alone with Miss Tina, Jordan discovers that letters and poems from Aspern do indeed exist and are in the house. On the old lady's demise, they will be Miss Tina's.

Act 2

Scene 1: The same, several weeks later, noon.

Mrs Prest asks Jordan how his quest is progressing. All he has had sight of is a portrait which he has been instructed to sell. He will 'purchase' the item himself as a move in the game. He may go away for a while, perhaps to Milan. In front of Juliana, Mrs Prest proposes an evening at Florian's to wish his journey well: it was where Aspern and Juliana first met.

Scene 2: The night of Jordan's journey.

Juliana sits alone with her box of precious papers. She recalls that eventful night at Florian's, the dancing, the looks, the feelings. Nothing in her power will allow any prying into those moments, those lives past. The papers are replaced but the box is not relocked.

Scene 3: Later the same night.

Miss Tina and Jordan return from their night out. In an echo of the previous scene, Tina has been clearly transported by the evening, the music, the dreams, the looks. She will do what she can about letting him have access to the papers. Alone, Jordan discovers the unlocked box. As he reaches for it, Juliana spies him from the doorway and cries out as a stroke lays her low. Jordan flees empty handed.

Act 3

Scene 1: The same, a week later, morning.

Tina relates the last hours of Juliana to Mrs Prest and Jordan, who has returned in haste. Alone with Tina, Jordan asks about the papers. They are now Tina's property and must stay with the family. Now, if he were only part of that family … but Jordan, blind to her suggestion, leaves her alone and desolate.

Scene 2: The same day, towards evening.

Miss Tina sits alone as a servant sings a melancholy song. Jordan insists upon seeing her and apologises for his behaviour. There is nothing to forgive, she says: he will leave Venice no doubt, and they will never meet again. Besides, she has done the 'great thing': she has destroyed the papers, one by one, in the little stove – after all, they were not her story. Stricken, Jordan leaves without another word. It is only when he has gone, this time forever, that Miss Tina takes the papers from the box and begins actually to burn them, one by one.

THE NIGHT OF THE WEDDING (1998)

This archly comic chamber piece is based on Frank Witney's play *Nuit de Noces*, which Hurd had first considered setting in the 1950s. It too was commissioned by the Port Fairy Festival and first performed there in 1998.

The setting is the Paris drawing room of the Count Gervaise de Polisson, one evening in 1810. The Marquise de Belle Poitrine bursts into the peace of the Count's evening, in distress. Tonight is her wedding night, her parents having forced her to marry a fat old glutton. Unable to contemplate her bridal duties, she has seen the Count's lighted windows and throws herself on his mercy. She notes that his manservant is a handsome chap. The Count feels a very strong attraction to her – and clearly has a duty to lend a helping hand, if not more.

The Marquis however has followed his bride and erupts into the drawing room. A challenge ensues and a duel is agreed – but inside the house. In a scene of confusion the young lady is apparently shot dead. Aghast and at a loss as to how to spend his wedding night now, the Marquis is advised by the Count that ladies of a certain reputation live nearby. The two men go off arm in arm, leaving the 'body' to Antoine: '*He will know what to do with it'.* Furious, the Marquise rises, and having cursed both men, lies back down again as she realises with a smile that Antoine will indeed very likely 'know what to do with her' on discovery.

For all the academic rigour and solemnity of the major part of his working life, Michael Hurd enjoyed a joke as well as anyone – especially if the tone were at all risqué. In this respect, *The Night of the Wedding* shares qualities with his earlier chamber work *The Widow of Ephesus* (1971).

In common with a great deal of Hurd's vocal writing, his own libretto and setting here are sparely yet deftly handled. The Marquise's rhyming narration of her plight has a clever lightness that epitomises his style, and the piece moves rapidly through its humorous moods to the elegantly engineered conclusion.

Michael Dendle, 2015

Irish Baritone, OWEN GILHOOLY studied in Ireland with Jean Holmes and subsequently at the Royal College of Music and National Opera Studio in London. In 2007 he represented Ireland at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. Recent operatic engagements include Robert Through his Teeth, a new opera commissioned by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Valentin Faust (Everyman Theatre) Emilio Il cappello di paglia di Firenze and Lord Salt The Golden Ticket (Wexford Festival Opera); Ferryman Curlew River (Nova Music Opera); Ivan Kaschey the Immortal and Bailiff The Maiden in the Tower (Buxton Festival); Shepherd Tristan und Isolde for Wide Open Opera; Escamillo, Papageno and Guglielmo all for Opera Theatre Company, Dublin and the title role Don Chisciotte in Sierra Morena (Musikwerkstatt Wien). Other roles include Rossini's Figaro, Marcello, Malatesta and Count Almaviva. He has appeared with orchestras including the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Camerata Ireland, Tokyo Symphony and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's. Performances with the BBC BBC Symphony Orchestra include L'enfance du Christ (Sir Andrew Davis) and Judith Weir's The Vanishing Bridegroom (Brabbins) as well as HMS Pinafore (Mackerras) and Osud (B lohlávek) at the BBC Proms. Owen is currently a Teaching Fellow at the the Royal Irish Academy of Music where is studying for a Doctorate of Music in Performance.

Born in Dorset, PIPPA GOSS graduated in French and Music from the University of Bristol and furthered her studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London. She was the first prize winner of the Thelma King Singing Competition. Pippa is a regular on the concert platform all over the UK and abroad, and is particularly in demand for singing baroque and classical repertoire. She has appeared many times on BBC Radio 3; sung with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; performed a Young Artist Series recital at the Cheltenham Music Festival and has sung at the London Handel Festival. Her opera roles include: Susanna (Mozart Le nozze di Figaro) for Mid-Wales Opera; for Opera Holland Park she has sung Dew Fairy and cover of Gretel (Humperdinck Hansel and Gretel) and Papagena in Simon Callow's production of The Magic Flute; Gretel (Hansel and Gretel) for the Julitafestivalen in Sweden; Norina (Donizetti Don

Pasquale), Zerlina (Mozart Don Giovanni), Flora (Britten Turn of the Screw) all for Opera Project and Flora (Tippett The Knot Garden) at the Montepulciano Festival. Pippa has also recorded Michael Hurd's The Widow of Ephesus singing the role of the Maid. She is based in Manchester, where she enjoys working on music education projects and teaching the next generation of young singers.

Mezzo-soprano CLARE MCCALDIN has built a diverse career following her debut in the 2000 Salzburg Easter Festival's Simone Boccanegra (as Un'Ancella) for Claudio Abbado. At the Royal Opera Clare has performed Cousin/Madama Butterfly, Apprentice/Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and La Servante/Manon. Other roles include Meg Page/Falstaff (Iford Arts), Fox/The Cunning Little Vixen & Örsze/Hary Janos (Ryedale Festival) and Oreste/La Belle Hélène (Diva Opera). In concert Clare has sung Bach Matthew Passion (King's College, Cambridge/Cleobury), Mozart Requiem and C Minor Mass (Three Choirs Festival/Partington), Walton Facade (Music of Renown Ensemble) and Bach St. Mark Passion (Barokksolistene Norway). In the 2012 BBC Proms she sang Marc, a Twin, in Debussy•s Martyrdom of St Sebastien with Knussen/BBCSO, reprised at the 2014 Edinburgh International Festival. Clare has performed new music by Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Cecilia McDowall, Brian Irvine, Alexander l'Estrange, Michael Zev Gordon and created roles and scenes for Opera North, Royal Opera, WNO and Aldeburgh. Madrigali dell'Estate, a CD of works written for her by Stephen McNeff was awarded four stars by BBC Music Magazine. She has recorded Hugh Wood's Laurie Lee Songs with Iain Burnside for NMC and a second solo CD with Libby Burgess for Champs Hill Records. She appeared in Errollyn Wallen's Cautionary Tales at the 2014 Latitude Festival and in Stephen McNeff's Prometheus Drowned, on tour for Nova Music Opera. Clare's company McCaldin Arts continues to tour her solo shows, Haydn's London Ladies and Vivienne.

Born in Preston, LOUISE WINTER studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, winning the Esso Glyndebourne and John Christie Awards. Since her debut as Dorabella with Glyndebourne Touring Opera, she has sung with major companies

including the Royal Opera, English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Opera Frankfurt, Berlin Staatsoper and La Monnaie, in roles including Carmen, Marguerite (Damnation of Faust), Brangäne, Venus (Tannhäuser), Lady Macbeth (Bloch's Macbeth), Preziosilla (Forza del destino), Kabanicha (Kat'a Kabanova) and Marcellina (Le Nozze di Figaro). She sang with Music Theatre Wales in Turnage's Greek at the Linbury Studio Theatre and the production also toured to Korea. She gave the world premiere of Charlotte Bray's Out of the Ruins for mezzo soprano, youth chorus and orchestra at a Gala Concert for the Royal Opera House in February 2015. Performances on DVD include the Goddess Diana (La Calisto) conducted by René Jacobs. She has performed with many of the world's leading orchestras and conductors, including the CBSO with Sir Simon Rattle, the BBC Symphony Orchestra with Sir Andrew Davis, the Hallé Orchestra with Mark Elder and the Philharmonia Orchestra under Sir Charles Mackerras.

The ULSTER ORCHESTRA is the only full-time professional symphony orchestra in Northern Ireland. The orchestra plays the majority of its concerts in Belfast's Ulster Hall and Waterfront Hall. It gives concerts across Northern Ireland, including performances at the Belfast Festival, the Wexford Opera Festival, the Kilkenny Arts Festival, and the National Concert Hall, Dublin. Since 1985, the Orchestra has been a regular visitor to The Proms. The Ulster Orchestra undertakes a wide range of outreach projects, including workshops in schools throughout Northern Ireland, pre-concert talks and instrument Masterclasses. The Orchestra received the Royal Philharmonic Society's first award for an education project (in West Belfast). Major cross-community projects involving Belfast schools in areas of social deprivation have included Gulliver in 2005, A Marvellous Medicine in 2007 and The Pied Piper in 2009 (these last two projects were created by the Orchestra's Associate Composer at the time, Brian Irvine). The Pied Piper project was awarded the Inspire Mark of the 2012 London Cultural Olympiad. In 2013, under the direction of the Orchestra's new Principal Conductor Rafael Payare, the 'Paper Orchestra' project took place in two areas in North/West Belfast – working with Good Shepherd Primary School in the Colin Neighbourhood and Malvern Primary School in the Shankill area. Local newsreader Paul Clarke was

the narrator for the production of Sergei Prokofiev's children's classic 'Peter and the Wolf' in the Dairy Farm Shopping Centre in the Colin Neighbourhood area of West Belfast, and in Boys Model School in North Belfast in the Shankill area.

English conductor GEORGE VASS studied at the Birmingham Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Music and made his professional conducting debut in London. As Artistic Director of Orchestra Nova and Nova Music Opera, he has appeared at many of the UK's major concert halls, theatres and festivals. As a guest conductor he has worked with a wide variety of ensembles including the Bournemouth Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National and Ulster orchestras, Joyful Company of Singers, London Mozart Players, Malmö Opera Orchestra and Oxford Orchestra da Camera. He has broadcast for BBC Radio 3 and Channel 4 television. George Vass has been Artistic Director of the critically acclaimed Presteigne Festival since 1992. His continually growing discography mirrors his strong interest in British composers with a wide variety of recordings of British music for Dutton Epoch, Guild, Naxos, Somm and Toccata Classics.

MATTHEW BUSWELL gained his Masters in Performance degree at the Royal College of Music, studying with Dinah Harris and Gary Matthewman, where he was a Robin Ritzema Scholar supported by the Audrey Sacher Award and a Douglas & Hilda Simmonds Award. Matt was also supported by the Josephine Baker Trust. Matt also gained his first class Bachelor of Music with Honours degree at the RCM where he studied with Russell Smythe and Simon Lepper. Operatic performances include Il Sonno Arianna in Creta and Licaone Giove in Argo (Royal College of Music International Opera School & London Handel Festival), Wilfred The Yeomen of the Guard (Portsmouth Guildhall), Calmon The Little Green Swallow, J.Dove (British Youth Opera), Sarastro Die Zauberflöte (RCMIOS), Superintendent Budd Albert Herring (RCMIOS) and Death Savitri (BYO). Concert performances include Raphael & Adam The Creation (Haydn), Bass Soloist Requiem (Mozart), Bass Soloist Mass in C (Beethoven) & Bass Soloist Nelson Mass (Haydn) and Christus St.Matthew Passion.

Matt has participated in Masterclasses with Roderick Williams, Brindley Sherratt, Jonathan Lemalu (RCM) and Sir John Tomlinson (Ludlow English Song Weekend & RCM).

www.mattbuswell.com

Welsh soprano RHIAN LOIS is a graduate of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, the Royal College of Music and National Opera Studio (NOS), London. Whilst at the NOS Rhian was supported by English National Opera, where she is currently a Harewood artist at ENO. Rhian was a semi-finalist at the 2014 International Belvedere competition in Düsseldorf, and is a 2014/15 International Opera Awards Foundation Bursary winner. Roles performed for ENO include Adele Die Fledermaus, First Niece Peter Grimes, Nerine Medea, Frasquita Carmen, Papagena Magic Flute, and Ivette The Passenger. Other roles include Pamina Magic Flute (Nevill holt), Eurydice in Telemann's Orpheus with Classical Opera at the London Handel Festival. She has also sung the roles of Zerlina Don Giovanni and Despina Cosi Fan Tutte in London. On demand on the concert platform, repertoire includes Mozart Requiem with the CBSO and Simon Halsey, CBSO's Stravinsky retrospective 'Igor Fest' , Brahms Requiem at Milton Court, Barbican, Handel's Messiah, Cambridge, Carmina Burana, Brangwyn Hall and Beethoven 9th Symphony in London. This season plans include Atalanta Xerxes (ENO), a World premiere by Tansy Davies where Rhian will perform Young Woman Between Worlds and Frasquita Carmen both for English National Opera. Concert appearances include Messiah with the CBSO at Symphony Hall Birmingham, a concert of Mozart Masterpieces at the Royal Festival Hall for Raymond Gubbay, and Rossini's Stabat Mater. Coming up highlights include Rhian’s débuts at the Royal Opera House as Papagna Die Zauberflöte, and a re-invitation as Musetta La Bohème for English National Opera, her debuts at Welsh National Opera as Barbarina Le Nozze di Figaro and Angelica Figaro gets a divorce, and Zerlina Don Giovanni in Santa Fe.

NICHOLAS MORTON studied at the Royal College of Music International Opera School under Peter Savidge, where he was a Richard Carne Scholar supported by a Sir Gordon Palmer Scholarship. Operatic roles include Erasto 'Giove in Argo' (London Handel Festival), Der Sprecher 'Die Zauberflote', L'horloge comtoise and Le Chat 'L'enfant et les Sortileges', Filippo 'La Gazzetta', Sid 'Albert Herring' (RCMIOS) as well as cover Truffaldino 'The Little Green Swallow' (British Youth Opera), and the title role in 'Don Giovanni' (Rye Festival). He has also created the role of The Architect in 'Serpentine; the analysis of beauty' for an RCM collaboration with Tete a Tete Opera. Nicholas is also a keen recitalist and concert performer with engagements across the UK and Europe including Bach's B minor mass and Passions, Handel's Messiah, and the Requiem Masses of Mozart, Faure, Brahms and Durufle. As a recitalist he has performed at the British Embassy in Paris, the Elgar rooms in the Royal Albert Hall, and Cadogan Hall. His range of repertoire includes several of the cycles of Schumann and he has a particular fondness for English song and French Melodies. Nicholas is extremely grateful for the support of the Countess of Munster Trust, a Tutton Award by Help Musicians UK, the Josephine Baker Trust, and a Martin Harris Scholarship.

SIMON LEPPER read music at King's College Cambridge. He is a professor of piano accompaniment at the Royal College of Music, London where he also co-ordinates the piano accompaniment course. He is an official accompanist for BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. Recent performance highlights have included an invitation from the Wigmore Hall, London to present a three concert project on the songs of Joseph Marx in their 2013/14 season; a recital tour with Stéphane Degout which included the Ravinia and Edinburgh Festivals; a recording with Dame Felicity Palmer and recitals with Angelika Kirchschlager at La Monnaie, Brussels and at the Wigmore Hall where appearances also have included recitals with Christopher Maltman, Elizabeth Watts, Stephan Loges, Sophie Bevan, Christopher Purves and Lawrence Zazzo. Future highlights include his debut recital at Carnegie Hall, New York with Karen Cargill; a recital of English Song with Sally Matthews at La Monnaie; a performance of Die Schöne Müllerin with Benjamin Appl: a BBC broadcast with Nicole Cabell and a performance with Mark Padmore of Schubert's Winterreise at the

Schubertiade, Hohenhems, Austria. Recordings include Warlock Songs with Andrew Kennedy (Landor), 2 volumes of Debussy Songs with Gillian Keith (Deux-Elles), the complete CW Orr Songs with Mark Stone (Stone Records) and a disc of Gustav and Alma Mahler songs with Karen Cargill (Linn records), a contemporary disc with violinist Carolin Widmann (ECM) and a disc of Brahms, Schubert and Beethoven with violinist Ji-Hae Park (Universal records).

RONALD CORP is the founder and Artistic Director of the New London Orchestra and the New London Children's Choir and also Musical Director of the London Chorus and the Highgate Choral Society. He has worked with the BBC Singers, the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Cape Philharmonic in South Africa. Among an extensive discography with the NLO are award-winning Hyperion discs of British Light Music Classics and an acclaimed recording of Rutland Boughton's opera, The Queen of Cornwall. His compositions include large and small choral works (including 'And all the trumpets sounded' and 'Dhammapada'), a children's opera 'The Ice Mountain', three string quartets, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', a piano concerto, a cello concerto and a symphony all of which are on disc. His experience and expertise in choral directing are crystallised in the textbook, The Choral Singer's Companion. Ronald Corp was awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours List 2012.

Owen Gilhooly

Pippa Goss

Clare McCaldin

Louise Winter

George Vass

Ulster Orchestra

Matthew Buswell

Rhian Lois

Nicholas Morton

Simon Lepper

Ronald Corp

The Aspern Papers

Chamber opera in three acts and seven scenes

Based on the novella by Henry James

Words and music by

MICHAEL HURD

Libretto

Transcribed from the composer's manuscript by Michael Dendle

© 1994 / 2010

Commissioned by the Port Fairy Spring Festival and first performed on 14 October 1995. Repeated at the Atheneum Theatre, Melbourne 11 & 12 November 1995

CAST OF FIRST PRODUCTION

Miss Tina	Ann Mackay
Mrs Prest	Margaret Haggart
Juliana	Jeannie Marsh
Harry Jordan	Ian Cousins
Servant	Kirsten Boerema
Gondoliers (silent)	Matthew Donnelly
	Cameron MacMillan
	Paul Knobloch
	Luke Giacomin

Production by Graeme Murphy

Chamber Orchestra of Geelong
Conducted by Brian Stacey

ORCHESTRATION

2 flutes / 2 oboes / 2 clarinets in Bb / 2 bassoons / 2 horns in F
Timpani / Percussion / Harp / Strings

ACT ONE. SCENE ONE

The sala of a dilapidated palazzo in Venice, one morning in 1880.

The stage is empty but in answer to an urgent knocking at an outer door a servant appears and soon ushers in Mrs Prest and Harry Jordan.

Servant — Please wait. The Signora will soon be back. She is in church.

Mrs Prest — In church ?

Servant — Every day. She will not be long.

Mrs Prest — And the Signora Bordereau ?

Servant — She sleeps. She is old, very old. Please to wait. She will not be long.

Mrs Prest — Well, Harry, here we are. La Casa Juliana.

He examines the room eagerly.

Jordan — Wonderful ! Just as I imagined it ! La Casa Juliana ! And a garden too ! A garden in Venice ! A garden floating in the sea. A magic island. La Casa Juliana !

Mrs Prest — It's certainly very … how shall I say ? Neglected. They haven't a penny, poor things. Never in society. I only heard of them by chance and now you come along. Wanting to meet them, wanting to know them, seeking to be their friend.

Jordan — Do you think they'll let me ? Stay, I mean. Take rooms here. Live with them, their guest, their friend.

Mrs Prest — They'll jump at it, poor things. They haven't a penny, never in society. You'll be their saviour, my dear. You'll change their lives.

Jordan — La Casa Juliana. I can hardly believe it !

Mrs Prest — Tell me, Harry. What is it you have in mind ? I'm still not sure. Miss Bordereau is old, I know. She has papers. You want them. That is why you are here. That is why I wrote to them, arranged an introduction. That is all I know.

Jordan — Yes, she is old. As old as time itself. But once, long ago when she was young, she was beautiful, she was loved. She was loved.

Mrs Prest — Loved ? By whom ?

Jordan — By Jeffrey Aspern. Poet. Hero ! The noblest of them all ! The subject of my book. The focus of my dream and all my waking hours. Dead these sixty years. Yet in his work immortal ! I seek the pattern of his days, the passing moments of his life. Relive the pleasures and the pain that made the poet, made the man a very god. His thoughts, his deeds are mine to trace. I must know everything there is to know and, knowing, I may bring to life again the very essence of the man himself. He is my god. I am his slave.

Mrs Prest — Well, I hope she'll listen, Juliana. She's very old and nearly blind. May not approve your eager ways. If she has secrets, she may wish to keep them to herself, take them unspoken to the grave.

Jordan — Don't worry, I'll find a way. Biographers are full of guile, I'll find a way, never fear.

Mrs Prest — Old ladies can be wily too. She'll have your measure.

Jordan — Then there's the niece. She'll be my entrée, she'll unlock the mystery.

Mrs Prest — Miss Tina ? Why should she provide the key ? Why ? How ?

Jordan — I'll charm her, make love to her.

Mrs Prest — Ha ha ! Wait 'til you see her.

There is the sound of an outer door opening. Miss Tina enters, flustered and in haste.

Miss Tina — Ah, you are here ! You waited. I am late. Please excuse me.

Jordan — Nothing to excuse, dear lady.

Mrs Prest — My dear Miss Tina, how well you look. May I introduce Mr Jordan, Mr Harry Jordan. The man I wrote to you about.

Jordan — Your servant.

Mrs Prest — You received my letter?

Miss Tina — Ah yes, your letter.

Mrs Prest — And what do you think ?

Miss Tina — Think ?

Mrs Prest — Of my proposal ?

Miss Tina — It seems possible.

Jordan — Oh, dear lady, I'm glad to hear it.

Miss Tina — A room ? Rooms ? We have them. Rooms we never go into, rooms we do not need. This house is large, too large for us. There are rooms, it is possible.

Jordan — And when may I come ?

Miss Tina — Come ? That is not for me to say. I must speak to her, explain everything. She will decide.

Jordan — A room ! A room where I may work, read and study, making little noise. Only the sound of my pen to break the silence. A writer is no trouble.

Miss Tina — She has known writers.

Jordan — Then she will know what it is. I'll be no trouble, silent as a ghost.

Miss Tina — She has known ghosts.

There is an awkward silence.

Jordan — It's settled then. When shall I come ?

Miss Tina — That's not for me to say. I must speak to her, explain. Come back tomorrow, no, in two day's time. You shall have your answer.

Jordan — You'll speak for me ?

Miss Tina — Yes, I will speak for you.

Jordan — In two days then.

Miss Tina	At six o'clock. It is better in the evening. She only lives at night.
Jordan	'Til then.
Miss Tina	'Til then.

He kisses her hand. Mrs Prest embraces her. She stands, motionless. Transfixed as they leave and the scene fades.

INTERLUDE

ACT ONE. SCENE TWO

The same, two days later. It is evening. Harry Jordan nervously awaits the arrival of Juliana. A door opens and Miss Tina enters with Juliana in a wheelchair pushed by the servant, who then leaves.

Jordan	Miss Bordereau.
Juliana	Please sit down Mr Jordan. There. I can hear very well.
{Jordan	I have expl …
{Juliana	Our house is far from the centre. But the little canal is very comme il faut.
Jordan	The garden …
Juliana	The garden ?
Jordan	A magic island, a garden in the middle of the sea.
Juliana	Indeed ?
Jordan	For my work. The quietness.
Miss Tina	Mr Jordan is a writer. He needs the quiet of a garden.
Juliana	In the middle of the sea, so I understand. The house, Mr Jordan, is large. You may have as many rooms as any writer needs. The garden too is yours, if you'll pay me a great deal of money.

There is a stunned silence. Jordan recovers himself.

Jordan — I will pay with pleasure and pay of course in advance whatever you think it is proper to ask.

Juliana — Well then, a thousand francs a month.

Miss Tina — So much ?

Juliana — Leave us, Christina. It is not your concern.

Miss Tina leaves.

Juliana — A thousand francs, Mr Jordan.

Jordan — So be it. A thousand francs.

Juliana — In advance.

Jordan — In advance. I shall take the room for three months. Tomorrow I shall pay you three thousand francs. At noon.

Juliana — In gold.

Jordan — Gold ? You are not afraid to keep so large a sum here in the house ?

Juliana — Of whom should I be afraid, Mr Jordan, if not of you ?

Jordan — In gold then.

Juliana — At noon.

Jordan — My hand upon it.

Juliana — I belong to a time when that was not the custom.

Jordan — Our ways are coarser now.

Juliana — Ah, very well. And what will you write in your room, in your magic island ?

Jordan — Why, essays. Studies. Of other writers. Their lives, their thoughts, their joys, their woes.

Juliana — Is that wise, Mr Jordan ? Are there to be no more secrets ?

Jordan — Only the truth, Miss Bordereau. The truth cannot harm us.

Juliana — You are young, Mr Jordan. Please ring the bell. Until tomorrow.

Jordan — Tomorrow.

Miss Tina and the servant appear. The servant wheels Juliana's chair away. Jordan turns to Miss Tina in jubilation.

Jordan — It is settled. Tomorrow I take possession of the rooms and a new life begins !

Miss Tina — A new life ?

Jordan — Oh, Miss Tina, I believe that you understand me, understand my needs, why I am here, why I have come. Yes, I am sure of it. I … I seek a poet.

Miss Tina — Jeffrey Aspern.

Jordan — You know !

Miss Tina — Others have come. Others have written. She will not help you, Mr Jordan. She keeps her secrets. Letters. Poems.

Jordan — Letters ! Poems ! Where, oh where ?

Miss Tina — She keeps them locked away. She reads them when she is alone, relives their story in her mind. But she will not speak …

Jordan — Ah, she must, she must ! She must not take her story to the grave. Aspern belongs to the world. Each facet of his life must be shared. The secret springs that made his art, that made the poet and the man. They must be known and I must know them. That is the focus of my dreams, the very purpose of my life. I need to understand his life, to trace the guiding pattern of his days. Whatever it may be I must know everything there is to know. An knowing, bring to life again the very essence of the man. He is my god. I am his slave. Will you not help me, Miss Tina ? Speak to her for me ?

Miss Tina — She will not hear me. She will not listen.

Jordan — Then be on guard at least. Make sure that nothing harms the

treasure she hoards. A treasure that belongs not to her alone, but to the world. The treasure of a poet's mind must not be lost.

Miss Tina She'd not destroy it.

Jordan If she should think the end is near, perhaps ? For she is old.

Miss Tina Yes, very old. Oh, but she loves them. Loves her papers. They are her life.

Jordan Her life indeed ! Then surely, surely she has made some disposition ?

Miss Tina Disposition ?

Jordan A testament ? A will ? Provision for you, her only relative.

Miss Tina She has so little to leave. But yes, that little will be mine. And that is why she asks so much of you. The rooms, the money, too much, too much, too much. She thinks of me, how I shall live when she is gone.

Jordan Then it is clear. You are her heir, the treasure will be yours to do with as you please.

Miss Tina Ah no, there will be terms, of that you may be sure. I'll do what I can, Mr Jordan.

Jordan Thank you, Miss Tina.

There is a long pause. She looks at him intently.

Miss Tina I'll do what I can.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO. SCENE ONE

The same, towards noon, several weeks later. Harry Jordan is in conversation with Mrs Prest, who is making a social call.

Jordan Miss Tina is with her now. They'll be here in a moment.

Mrs Prest — No need to apologise. I called to pay my respects. But only because I hoped to talk with you, dear friend. I'm curious to hear how you fare. Your poet, Jeffrey Aspern. Your lady, Juliana. What have you discovered ?

Jordan — Everything. Nothing.

Mrs Prest — Everything and nothing ? What are you trying to say ?

Jordan — Oh, there are letters, poems, who know what else besides ? But she is on guard, day and night, she hints, she smiles, says nothing. And I sometimes thinks she plays with me, as once, perhaps, she played with him. Each move I make, she counters. Charmingly, adroitly. Oh, but her mind is keen !

Mrs Prest — And the other ? Miss Tina ? Will she not help you, or is she impervious to your charms ?

Jordan — Oh, she's willing – eager, even, but she's afraid. The old woman rules her even now. There is little she can say or do for me.

Mrs Prest — So you have gained nothing ?

Jordan — Not quite. This portrait, in miniature. Painted by her father. She wants me to sell it, obtain the highest price.

Mrs Prest — And will you ?

Jordan — Oh, yes indeed. I shall sell it to myself, and at the highest price. There is no price I would not pay for such a treasure.

Mrs Prest — A handsome face. A face, half angel and half devil. No wonder that she fell ! No woman could resists such charms. Is it a likeness ?

Jordan — Yes, oh yes ! Exact. He was a god among men. Handsome and clever. A poet, a soldier, a lover, saint and devil. Just as you see it.

Mrs Prest — And you will be the unknown buyer, prepared to pay her price.

Jordan — Exactly.

Mrs Prest — Ah, Harry ! You are too sly. You also hint and smile, you guard your secret, just as she guards hers. I wonder who will win the

game ? Biographer or prey ? Checkmate so far.

Jordan — I've sometimes thought that if I went away, just a few days. Milan, perhaps ?

Mrs Prest — Milan ? Milan ?

Jordan — I'd sing its praises, compare it to Venice, hint that I might prefer to settle there now that summer's near. She might relent.

Mrs Prest — Relent ? Relent ?

Jordan — They are so poor, that much is clear. The rent I pay her is a godsend.

Mrs Prest — It's far too much, far too much !

Jordan — She plans for the future. Miss Bordereau, I mean.

Mrs Prest — She has no future, she is too old. Her future's in the grave.

Jordan — No, no ! Miss Tina, it is for her she plans. Plans how she may live in comfort, here alone. And therefore, if it seems that I may move away, she may relent and show me what I'd give my life to see. The Aspern papers.

Mrs Prest — So devious a subterfuge. Are you not ashamed ?

Jordan — Oh no, oh no, indeed no ! There's nothing I would not do, no step I would not take to gain my ends. What Juliana guards belongs to everyone. Aspern's disciples are spread throughout the world. Each word he uttered, each thought is precious to them. I will not let he take her spoils unpublished to the grave.

Mrs Prest — Perhaps.

Juliana and Tina enter.

Mrs Prest — Ah, here they come.

Juliana — Mrs Prest ?

Mrs Prest — How well you look, Miss Bordereau.

Juliana — And should I not ?

Mrs Prest — I only …

Miss Tina — She's in good health and spirits.

Juliana — She ? She ! And who is "she" I pray ?

Mrs Prest — Miss Bordereau is …

Juliana — As well as may be. She's old and tired and easily displeased. You must forgive these morning humours.

Mrs Prest — I understand. Venice can undermine the most determined spirit. Its damps. Its chills. I understand. But I also see that you are well in all that matters. And I'm glad.

Juliana — Thank you. We much appreciate your kind intentions. And how is Mr Jordan ? We see little of him, Mrs Prest. Even the scratching of his pen does not disturb our solitude. He asks us questions of the past. The present hardly touches us at all.

Jordan — And I'll be quieter still. I mean to make a journey soon. Milan. I've business there, a friend to meet.

Juliana — Indeed. Indeed ? And when do you propose to make the trip ?

Jordan — Next week, on Monday. I shall take the midnight train. A few days, that is all, although it may be that I'll need eventually to spend more time away. Perhaps to live, who knows ?

Miss Tina — Leave Venice ? Us ?

Jordan — Who knows ?

Mrs Prest — On Monday ? Twelve o'clock ! An awkward time. You'll need distractions to keep you wide awake. Why don't we dine together, be my guests ? At Florian's, it will be the perfect bon voyage.

Juliana — (aside) It's where we met.

Jordan — We ? Who ?

Juliana — A friend, of no importance. It was long ago, I was young.

Mrs Prest — You will come then ?

Juliana — No, not I. Society is not for me. If I should leave these crumbling walls it will not be to view the social scene, but somewhere else – less sweet.

Jordan — Miss Bordereau …

Juliana — But not just yet. I'll wait until I'm called. Miss Tina, she may go, take her. Take her, let her dine at Florian's in the square. Society will do her good. She's sat too long with me and I with her. She needs the social scene far more than I do. So take her, Mr Jordan, show her life !

Miss Tina — You'll be alone.

Jordan — You'll come ?

Juliana — She'll come.

She motions to Miss Tina to ring the bell for the servant.

INTERLUDE

ACT TWO. SCENE TWO

The night of Harry Jordan's journey. Miss Bordereau sits alone. A box on a nearby table is open and she is looking through its contents – papers, letters, poems, faded memorials of the past. As she reads she remembers.

Juliana — Florian's ! It was spring. The little band played waltzes. People danced. I was nineteen. So long ago. He was so handsome, so alive. His eyes burned into mine, like fire, like ice. He took my hand. "Permesso, signora ? Will you honour me and dance ?" My father nodded, "Yes." The little band played waltzes. It was spring.

Will they dance, I wonder ? Christina and that man. Perhaps he will take her hand, gaze into her eyes ? No, they will merely dine and talk to no purpose. He's what she needs. A man at least … though not like him. No poet, he. Paper's his passion. He lives

through other people's lives. No poet, he. Well, maybe he'll learn them in the end, the secrets of that happy, happy spring, so long ago. How many years ? Sixty ? Sixty-five ? No ! It was yesterday !

"She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies; and all that's best of dark and light meet in her accent and her eyes …" My eyes, he said. My eyes ! Oh, he was handsome ! So alive ! He took my hand, my father nodded, "Yes." The little band …

I've kept it safe, that memory, hidden from the world, from prying eyes. Why should they taste the tempest of our love ? Peering ! Poking ! Nothing left unsaid. It is my life, my love. Not to be shared. It is my life, my love, not theirs, not theirs.

And yet, perhaps ? For her, Christina. For her good when I am gone ? Not too long to wait. My love, I come. The little band played waltzes. Shall we dance ? Your lips ! Your poet's lips ! Your words ! Your poet's words !

"I shall send you down the ages in my song. Immortal Juliana, ever young !" And then you died and I was left alone to mourn, here in this living tomb, where once we laughed and cried.

"We'll go no more a-roving…" Was that it ? How did it go, that song ? "So we'll go no more a-roving so late into the night, tho' the heart be still as loving, the moon be still as bright. For the sword outwears its sheath and the soul wears out the breast, and the heart must pause to breathe, and love itself have rest. Though the night was made for loving and the day returns too soon, yet we'll go no more a-roving by the light of the moon."

She replaces the papers and closes the box but does not lock it. As she dozes the servant appears and wheels her chair away.

INTERLUDE

ACT TWO. SCENE THREE

Later the same night. It is eleven o'clock and Miss Tina and Harry Jordan have returned from their evening out. As she begins to remove her cloak, Jordan steps forward to help her.

Jordan	Let me.
Miss Tina	Thank you. I've been so long out of the ways of society, it's strange to be so attended.
Jordan	You've been too long alone.
Miss Tina	oh, yes it's true. Our loves are simple. We live from day to day in perfect harmony. I'm never really on my own. All I need is here in this house.
Jordan	And yet it's clear she makes demands on you.
Miss Tina	She makes demands that I am happy to fulfil.
Jordan	You are her servant, morning, noon and night. Her servant and her slave.
Miss Tina	And if I am ? Is that so wrong ? What else would you have me do ?
Jordan	Why, nothing I suppose. You do as you must. A prisoner of duty …
Miss Tina	A prisoner of love. I owe so much to her. She's all I have, my only relative. I do no grudge the time she asks, demands of me. She has the right.
Jordan	Maybe. I do not know. But none the less you have your needs, dream your dreams.
Miss Tina	Yes, Mr Jordan …
Jordan	Harry, please.
Miss Tina	I've dreamed my dreams and dreamed they might come true. Tonight it seemed … The music and the lights ! Food, such as I'd forgotten. Oh, it was so fine ! Our life here is so simple. Tonight has been like heaven.

Jordan — I'm glad that you enjoyed our little farewell meal. And I enjoyed it too. Enjoyed your company.

Miss Tina — And now you have to go.

Jordan — In just an hour. My bags are packed. The gondola will soon be here. I take the midnight train, I journey through the night.

Miss Tina — I shall think of you and pray for your return to Venice, safe and sound.

Jordan — And will you do the thing we talked about ? The papers ? Speak to her and pave the way ?

Miss Tina — What can be done, I'll do. But she is old, she'll not give way unless she thinks it's for her good, or mine. It sometimes seems the papers are her life. Without them, she would die.

Jordan — So must we all, one day. But not a poet's words. They live for ever.

Miss Tina — And have we truly lived ? Oh, yes, she has. But I ? I'm not so sure. This house is like a living tomb. The past is everywhere. You've opened doors, let in the light. I've never known such happiness, such cheerfulness of heart. We'll miss you very much, Mr Jordan. Harry. Goodbye. We need the light you bring into our cloistered lives.

Jordan — Miss Tina, friend. Good night.

Gravely he kisses her hand. Moved, she hesitates then leaves the room. He goes to pick up his luggage, notices the unlocked box, its key still in the lock. He approaches it and reaches out, not realising that Juliana is watching him from the doorway.

Juliana — Ah ! You publishing scoundrel !

He starts back as Juliana falls to the ground clutching her heart. He moves to help her but backs away appalled, picks up his luggage and leaves in haste and confusion.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE. SCENE ONE

The same, a week later. It is morning and Mrs Prest is in earnest conversation with Miss Tina.

Mrs Prest — As soon as I heard the news I sent a telegram. He should be here by now. His train was due an hour ago.

Miss Tina — Thank you. He did not leave an address. I did not know where he could be found. Milan, he said. That's all, then I thought of you.

Mrs Prest — How like a man ! So thoughtless !

Miss Tina — Is that what men are like ?

Mrs Prest — So selfish ! Oh yes, he's no exception. They never think, we suffer, they never notice. Their way's their own.

There is a knock at the outer door. The servant goes to answer it.

Mrs Prest — Mr Jordan has returned, I think.

Harry Jordan enters in haste.

Jordan — Miss Tina. Mrs Prest. I came as soon as I could. What can I say ? Miss Bordereau no more ! How did it happen ?

Miss Tina — We found her, in the morning, the morning after you left. She lay there, still breathing. She never uttered a word. She lingered throughout the day. She never spoke again. Then shortly after sunset she turned her head and died. There was nothing we could do to help her. A stroke, the doctor said.

Jordan — That was a week ago.

Miss Tina — You never told us where to find you. There was so much to do. It was several days before I thought to turn to Mrs Prest.

Jordan — Your banker had instructions.

Miss Tina — The telegram …

Jordan — Reached me yesterday. I took the first train I could. And the funeral ?

Miss Tina — On Wednesday, in the morning. She lies there, at San Michele, on the island, as she ordered.

Mrs Prest — Well, I must leave you. There is much you have to talk about, I'm sure. Goodbye, Miss Tina. My deepest sympathy. Anything I can do, Harry …

Miss Tina rings the bell. The servant appears and ushers Mrs Prest out.

Jordan — I'm sorry. So very sorry.

Miss Tina — It's what she wanted. She was so weary. Her life had become a burden. She was ready to go.

Jordan — You'll miss her. You'll be alone now.

Miss Tina — Yes, alone now.

Jordan — What will you do ?

Miss Tina — Do ? I do not know. [5] Something may happen, who knows ?

Jordan — Dear Miss Tina, I must ask you … yet I scarcely dare …

Miss Tina — The papers ?

Jordan — Do you have them ?

Miss Tina — They are mine now. There were more than I supposed.

Jordan — More ! And I may see them ?

Miss Tina — I don't know how. She left instructions in her will. They were quite plain. The papers must remain within the family. And when the family is no more, they'll be destroyed.

Jordan — And no-one else may see them ? Not even I ? Not even I ?

Miss Tina — She had her reasons. Can you not guess them ?

Jordan — I … I do not know what I should think.

Miss Tina — If … if … if you were related …

Jordan — Related ?

Miss Tina — It would be different.

Jordan — Different ?

Miss Tina — If you were not a stranger, then it would be for you as it is for me. What now is mine would equally be yours. You could then do as you pleased. I could not stop you. She thought it out. She wanted me to be happy. And if anyone should be kind to me … she wanted that, I'm sure. I am sure, sure, sure. And so, if you were … oh, I don't know what to say, I'm too tormented, too ashamed. Do you not see ? I'd give you everything. She would understand.

Jordan — Ah, Miss Tina ! It would not do ! It would not do !

Aghast, he rushes out, leaving her desolate and alone.

INTERLUDE

ACT THREE. SCENE TWO

Towards evening, the same day. The servant, singing quietly, is busy about the room. Miss Tina sits in silence.

Servant — "A widow bird sat mourning for her love, upon a wintry bough. The frozen wind crept on above, the freezing stream below. There was no leaf upon the forest bare, no flower upon the ground, and little motion in the air, except the mill wheel's sound."

Miss Tina — I've never heard that song before. It's very beautiful and sad. You sing it well. Where did you learn it ?

Servant — From her. The old one. She sang it when she was alone.

Miss Tina — "A widow bird sat mourning …" How does it go ?

Servant — "A widow bird sat mourning for her love, upon a wintry bough. The frozen wind crept on above, the freezing stream belo …"

There is an urgent knocking at the outer door.

Miss Tina — See who it is. I am not at home to anyone.

The servant goes but returns in haste. Harry Jordan enters impetuously.

Servant	Signor Jordan, Signorina. He insists on seeing you.
Jordan	I had to come.
Miss Tina	Mr Jordan !
Jordan	To apologise.
Miss Tina	There is no need.
Jordan	Ah, yes there is. I'm desperately ashamed. The thing you had to say was so strange. It took me by surprise. I could not think clearly. I did not think. Will you forgive me and forget ?
Miss Tina	There is nothing to forgive. I understand. I shall forget.
Jordan	Miss Tina …
Miss Tina	You will leave Venice now, I think ? Today, perhaps ? Tomorrow ? It does not matter. We shall not meet again.
Jordan	Yes, I shall go. And you ? What will you do ?
Miss Tina	I do not know. It does not matter. I've done the great thing.
Jordan	Done ? Done what ?
Miss Tina	Destroyed the papers.
Jordan	Destroyed them !
Miss Tina	One by one. There, in the little stove.
Jordan	One by one !
Miss Tina	It took so long. Now, only the ash remains. [spoken, ad lib] I'm sorry, Mr Jordan. I saw no reason to keep what was not mine. It was her life they sanctified. My life is nothing. Never was.
Jordan	You burned them ? One by one ! Ah !
Miss Tina	There is nothing now, only the ash remains. Goodbye, Mr Jordan. I wish you well.

Stricken, Harry Jordan leaves without another word.

For a moment Miss Tina stands motionless. Then slowly she opens Juliana's box of papers and takes out it contents. She crosses to the little stove and begins to drop the papers in, one by one.

CURTAIN

Michael Hurd
West Liss, Hampshire
© 25 May 1994

The Night of the Wedding

Chamber opera in one act

From the play *Nuit de Noces* by Frederick Witney

Words and music by

MICHAEL HURD

Libretto

Transcribed from the composer's manuscript by Michael Dendle

© 1998 / 2010

Commissioned by the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival

The scene is the drawing room of the Count Gervaise de Polisson's house in Paris, the year 1810. There are double doors placed centrally at the back of the stage and ordinary doors opposite each other in the two side walls.

Antoine, the Count's manservant, enters and tidies the room, pausing to enjoy the music being played on a harpsichord in the room behind the double doors. Smiling, he leaves.

The music stops and the Count enters. He rings a small bell. Antoine reappears.

Antoine	You rang, sir ?
Count	More lights, Antoine.
Antoine	Yes sir.
Count	I am not at home to anyone. You may lock the doors.

Bowing, Antoine leaves. The Count picks up his pipe, opens a novel and begins to read.

Count	How nice to be alone. A pipe, a book. Nothing to distract or harass me. A pipe, a book. It is all that any man needs.

There is a sudden rumpus outside, voices in altercation. Antoine enters in great confusion, followed by a slightly dishevelled young lady. She is beautiful and in distress.

Antoine	A young lady, sir ! She won't go away !
Marquise	Save me ! Save me ! Save me !
Count	At your service, madam.

The Count is all attention. He is clearly excited by the young lady's beauty. Antoine too is impressed and casts longing eyes in her direction.

Count	A glass of wine ?
Marquise	Thank you. I am in great distress.
Count	Madam, with such beauty as yours that is hardly surprising. Pray tell me, what is the matter ?
Marquise	First, let me introduce myself. The Marquise de Belle Poitrine.
Count	Yours to command, madam. I am the Count Gervaise de Polisson. At your service. You may go now, Antoine.

Sighing heavily, Antoine leaves.

Marquise	What a handsome man your servant is !
Count	Really ? I've never noticed. Won't you tell me all about it ?
Marquise	Oh, sir. I can hardly bring myself to talk about it. It is all too painful.
Count	Perhaps another sip of wine ?
Marquise	Thank you. The facts are really very simple, despicable, unspeakable and sordid !
Count	Sordid ?
Marquise	Tonight … tonight is my wedding night.
Count	Your wedding night ?
Marquise	Yes, my wedding night !
Count	I don't quite understand.
Marquise	It is very simple. Listen. My parents thought it very smart to lacerate my virgin heart. They pledged me to a man as old as mutton !
Count	How very shocking. !
Marquise	Well, he was so old, coarse and fat I took one look and that was that. I said I'd rather love a dog or cat, a donkey or a sewer rat …
Count	A sewer rat !
Marquise	Than that old glutton !
Count	A most distressing tale. What did you do ?
Marquise	Alas, for me, I had no choice. Despite the anguish in my voice, my father, acting out his whim, insisted that I marry him. And so this very morn I did.
Count	A very sad and sordid tale !

Marquise — But when the moment came tonight, to exercise his marriage right, I couldn't stand the sight of that old sinner.

Count — No-one could blame you.

Marquise — I looked around in my distress for succour in this awfulness when, like a beacon in the night I saw your window shining bright and thought it best to run away and throw myself without delay upon your mercy, come what may.

Count — A very wise decision. You couldn't find a man more willing to lend a helping hand. When Cupid aims his dart then no man can resist the power of love.

Marquise — What is this feeling in my heart ? Oh can it be the power of love ?

Count — This is the moment, the moment is near …

Marquise — Should he hold me, enfold me, there's nothing to fear …

Count — Yes, maybe this is the moment …

Marquise — Yes, maybe this is the moment …

{Count — I've waited for !

{Marquise — I've waited for !

Count — Won't you take another little sip of wine ?

Marquise — Thank you.

Count — When beauty's in distress there's no resisting its appeal.

Marquise — When beauty's in distress can any man deny it a helping hand ?

Count — When beauty's in distress there's no denying how I feel.

Marquise — When beauty's in distress we know what Mother Nature's planned.

Count — She's such a charming creature ! So innocent and pure.

Marquise — I do not need a teacher to convince me he's a man I could adore.

{Count — When beauty's in distress a cavalier deserves a kiss or two or three

or four.

{Marquise When beauty's in distress a cavalier deserves a kiss or two or three.

As their passion begins to mount there is the sound of an altercation as, sweeping Antoine to one side, the Marquis enters in a great rage.

Marquis Where is she ?

{Marquise My husband !

{Count Her husband !

Marquise Confusion, oh confusion !

Count Confusion, oh confusion !

Marquis Young lady, come with me !

Marquise Farewell to all illusion.

Count Farewell to all illusion.

Marquis You now belong to me !

Marquise Whatever will become of me now ?

Marquis Come madam, cease your crying. I find it very trying.

Count We're going to have the devil of a row !

Marquis Resign yourself to coming with me !

Marquise Oh, what will become of me ?

Marquis Now, madam, come with me !

Count I have to set her free !

Marquis That for you sir !

He strikes the Count.

Count At your service.

{Marquis Choose your weapons.

{Count Choose your weapons.

Count Pistols ?

Marquise So be it. We fight at dawn ?

Count It's the usual time.

Marquis Oh, no !

Count What's the matter ?

Marquis Dawn won't be here for many, many hours.

Count And so ?

Marquis Tonight was to be my wedding night.

Marquise Monster ! Monster !

{Count Shut up !

{Marquis Shut up !

Count I understand your problem. And I've the solution !

Marquis Tell me about it.

Count You will go through this door and I will go through that door. We will hunt each other through the house …

Marquis And shoot on sight ?

Count And shoot on sight !

Marquis Yes, I will go through this door and you will go through that door. We will hunt each other through the house …

Marquise And then ?

{Count We shoot on sight ! Agreed ?

{Marquis We shoot on sight ! Agreed ?

Marquise And what shall I do ?

Count Madam, in the next room you will see before you a harpsichord of

quality and music to delight the most discriminating taste. Enjoy yourself, dear madam. I will be with you directly. And then … who knows ?

Exeunt omnes. The harpsichord play offstage. The Marquise is not an expert sight-reader, makes many mistakes and finally slams the keyboard in exasperation. After a moment she reappears.

Bored, she leafs through the Count's novel. A pistol appears around the edge of each of the opposite doors. She tosses the novel aside so that it lands on the table with a bump.

The pistols fire simultaneously and she falls to the ground. The men burst in and are aghast.

{Count You've killed her ! We've killed her !

{Marquis You've killed her ! We've killed her !

Count Poor little creature …

Marquis Made for love …

Count Soft as a dove.

Marquis Poor little creature.

Count Made for love.

Marquis Soft as a dove.

Count She was so fair and young …

Marquis She was so young and fair …

Count A virgin maid, so young, so beautiful !

Marquis I thought she would be dutiful !

Count Oh, the waste !

Marquis Not a taste !

Count Alas, the day that I was born …

Marquis Enough ! This is absurd !

Count Absurd ?

Marquis — Yes. Tonight should have been my wedding night and now my bride lies cold as mutton !

Count — Wait ! I've an idea. There is a lady, a good friend of mine. She keeps a house of good repute. She'll know how a man should spend his wedding night !

Marquis — Ah, Count, I fear you're a very sad rogue ! Lead on ! One moment. What about the body ?

Count — The body ? Antoine will find the body in the morning. He'll know what to do with it.

Laughing, the two men leave, arm in arm. The Marquise sits up. She is furious. She thinks for moment, sees the bell and, smiling, rings it loudly. She lies down again, in blissful expectation.

Marquise — Swine ! Monsters ! Degenerate beasts ! Antoine shall find the body and I'm sure he'll know what to do with it !

CURTAIN

Michael Hurd
Liss, Hampshire
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